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THE LATE DOCTOR FRANCIS SORREL. A Picturesque Character.

To the Editor of the Georgia Historical Quarterly:

Some eight or nine months ago there died in the city of Washington, in the 87th year of his age, Dr. Francis Sorrel, a native of Savannah, who, though almost unknown to Savannahians of the present day, was perhaps one of the most picturesque characters in private life ever born on Savannah soil.

Dr. Sorrel was the son of the late Mr. Francis Sorrel of this city, a prominent and highly esteemed citizen descended from an old French family. He was also an elder brother of that dashing soldier, General G. Moxley Sorrel, who illustrated the manhood of Savannah on many blooded battlefields during the war between the states.

Dr. Sorrel's early education was acquired at one of the private schools of his native town. After completing his High School course, he entered the University of Princeton and graduated in the academic department, and at the time of his death was one of the oldest graduates of that venerable institution of learning.

From Princeton he went to the University of Pennsylvania, where he received his degree of Doctor of Medicine. His education completed, he made a tour of Europe to improve himself by travel and observation. Owing to his family connections he had exceptional opportunities for meeting with the aristocracy of the countries he visited, and the stories of his experiences in Paris and Vienna would make an entertaining and instructive booklet.

Returning to America he located in Savannah for the purpose of practicing his profession, and occupied as his office rooms in the basement of the old Sorrel (now Weed) mansion on the corner of Bull and Harris Streets, the entrance to which was by a gateway in the brick wall on Bull street, which encloses the premises, since bricked up, but the outlines of which are still discernible.

It was during this period of his career that Doctor Sorrel served as second to Stuart Elliott, half uncle of Theodore Roosevelt, who fought the famous duel with Captain Daniels—resulting in the death of the latter. The Doctor's dramatic

account of this unfortunate affair, of which he never spoke until the actors themselves and their friends had long since crossed the "bourn from which no traveler returns," was intensely interesting; particularly his graphic description of the home-coming of Elliott and himself from the scene of the fatal encounter. How at Screven's Ferry they boarded a large canoe propelled by negro oarsmen and proceeded up the river to a landing; and how the city docks were thronged with excited people, many of them society ladies and gentlemen with whom Elliott was very popular, and having heard rumors of the duel were anxious to learn the fate of their favorite; and what cheers rent the air, and how hats and handkerchiefs were waved when the crowd recognized Elliott and realized that he was safe—a stirring scene it must have been.

Being of a roving disposition, the routine of the practice of his profession in a small city did not appeal to him, and after a few years he gave up his practice and residence in Savannah and accepted a commission as surgeon in the United States Army, serving with distinction in the Indian disturbances which were then agitating Florida. It was about this time that the country was stirred by the marvellous tales of the wealth and wonders of the State of California, and adventurous spirits from all sections of the East were rushing to the new El Dorado. Inoculated with the virus of wonderlust and by nature bold and venturesome and well fitted for frontier life, Dr. Sorrel resigned his commission in the army and joining with the hosts of kindred spirits sailed for San Francisco by way of Panama. Arriving there, he located immediately at one of the largest mining camps and resumed the practice of his profession and soon established a lucrative practice—his fees ranging in those days from \$10 and upwards for a visit, payable in gold dust.

Owing to his skill as a surgeon and the urbanity of his manners he soon became very popular with the miners and in 1860-1861 was elected a member of the Legislature of California, and was one of the minority members of that body who voted for secession. Convinced that the Southern cause on the Pacific Slope was irretrievably lost, he resigned from the Legislature and determined to cast his fortunes with his own people. Fearing arrest if he attempted to return by sea, he started on the long and then perilous journey by

pony express back across the western half of the American continent. After weeks of travel replete with dangers, privations and thrilling experiences, equalling almost the tribulations of St. Paul himself, he succeeded in reaching Kentucky and entering the Confederate lines. He proceeded at once to Richmond and offered his services to the Confederate Government and was commissioned a surgeon in the Southern Army. His ability was speedily recognized and his promotion rapid and at the close of the war he was one of the medical Directors and in line of promotion to the position of Surgeon General.

After the war closed he married an estimable and intellectual lady, Mrs. Rives, nee Watts, and settled on her estate near Roanoke, Virginia—and the “Barrens” (the name by which their country home was designated), became the hospitable meeting ground for the gentry of the neighborhood. Later he united with the Episcopal Church, of which denomination he was a consistent member up to the time of his death. His married life was exceptionally happy and lasted for some twenty years, when his wife died—a blow from which he never fully recovered.

A few years after the death of Mrs. Sorrel, the Doctor disposed of his Virginia estate and moved to Washington City where he had a number of relatives and old friends.

Springing from a noble family, Dr. Sorrel showed his descent in his personal appearance, his little mannerisms and kindly wit. Of medium height, but strongly knit, with black hair and eyes and finely chiseled features, he was an unusually handsome man. His charming manners and graceful gestures were fitting companions of his softly modulated voice, making captives of all who came in contact with him. He was chivalrous and deferential in his treatment of women and brave but considerate in his intercourse with men. In the drawing room “a squire of dames,” in the field “a splendid spur.” With all his accomplishments, he was modest to a fault—the surest test of gentle birth.

The writer will always cherish with delight the memory of the several occasions during the latter years of the old Doctor’s life, on which he enjoyed the privilege of sitting down with him in his commodious apartment at The Brighton in Washington City, and, over a good cigar or a glass of old wine, listening to his charming reminiscences of the days of long ago.

It may be that the modern doctrines of total abstinence, of the dethronement of woman from her high state to the level of man, and of intolerance towards all weaknesses which flesh is heir to, but which are indulged in, in one way or another, by those who profess to despise them, will make more efficient men than the gentlemen of the Old School, but I seriously doubt if they will make more lovable men.

For my part, give me as my companion in life a man of the type of Dr. Francis Sorrel, rather than one after the order of the Apostles and Disciples of the new Faith.

W. W. MACKALL.

NOTE: As the information on which the above narrative was based was almost entirely derived from the writer's recollections of conversations with Dr. Sorrel, his old friends and members of his family, it may contain some inaccuracies, particularly in the sequence of events, but in the main it is correct.

THE BEGINNING OF COTTON CULTIVATION IN GEORGIA.

In the year 1828 the Savannah Georgian published a communication written by Mr. Thomas Spalding, of Sapelo Island, giving an account of the introduction of cotton into Georgia and Carolina. Some of the facts stated by him have been since then reprinted in various publications, all of them quoting the following passage substantially:

"The winter of '86 brought several parcels of cotton seed from the Bahamas to Georgia. Among them, (in distinct remembrance in my mind,) was a parcel to the late Governor Tattnall, of Georgia, from a near relation of his, then Surveyor General of the Bahamas, and another parcel at the same time was transmitted to Col. Roger Kelsall of Exuma, (who was among the first, if not the very first, successful grower of cotton) to my father, Mr. James Spalding, then residing on St. Simon's Island, Georgia, who had been connected in business with Col. Kelsall before the Revolution. I have heard that Gov. Tattnall, then a young man, gave his seed to Mr. Nicholas Turnbull, lately deceased, who cultivated it from that period successfully."

From the foregoing it will be seen that credit was given to Mr. Nichol (not Nicholas) Turnbull for his part in the growing of cotton at an early period. It is highly probable that Mr. Spalding was not acquainted with the discussion